DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 387 EC 172 906

AUTHOR Doherty, P. J.
TITLE Special Education in N.S.W.: Principles Underlying the Provision of Services.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (63rd, Anaheim, CA, April 15-19, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; *Educational Philosophy; Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Intervention; Normalization (Handicapped); Program Development; Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (New South Wales)

ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the principles underlying special education services in New South Wales, Australia. Ten principles are elucidated: (1) the recognition that all children benefit from an educational program; (2) a belief in the benefits of intervention as early as possible; (3) similar goals for special education yet different means from those of regular education; (4) the concept of normalization (including tenets of placement in the least restrictive environment and in age-appropriate programming); (5) the emphasis of developing functional life skills (using adaptations of the normal curriculum where possible); (6) use of assessment procedures (such as interviews and observations) upon which individualized education programs can be developed; (7) the importance of community consultation; (8) the necessity of quality preservice and inservice teacher education; (9) the creative use of technology, particularly in areas of communication, mobility, and life skills training; and (10) the use of prevalence figures for planning. It is asserted that adherence to the 10 principles will promote flexibility in service delivery. (CL)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN N.S.W.

PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES

P.J. Doherty, Ph.D. (University of Qld)
Director, Division of Guidance and Special Education
N.S.W. Department of Education

Annual Convention 1985

Council for Exceptional Children

April 15-19

California, U.S.A.

EC172606

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NSW - PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.

The past decade has been characterised by a number of educational developments, not least of which have been the provisions for children in special need. Such provisions are generally considered under the generic term special education.

This paper addresses the principles which underlie such provisions in our state and the likely directions that these principles may lead the system in the future.

1. The Recognition that all Children Benefit from an Educational Program.

The first principle in providing services is the recognition that all children benefit from an educational program. In the report "Strategies and Initiatives for Special Education in N.S.W." (1982), attention is drawn to the United Nations declarations for the "Rights of the Child" (1959), the "Rights of the Mentally Retarded" (1971) and the "Rights of the Disabled" (1975).

> "The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by his particular condition". (Rights of the Child.)
>
> "The mentally retarded person has, to the maximum degree of feasibility, the same rights as other human beings." (Rights of the Mentally Retarded.)
>
> "Disabled persons ... have the same fundamental rights as their fellow citizens of the same age, which implies first and foremost, the right to enjoy a decent life, as normal and full as possible". (Rights of the Disabled.)

The principle of education for all has only recently been accepted by governments and is still in the early stages of implementation. This applies particularly to a category of children and youth identified as "severely/profoundly handicapped". For many years, there was a tendency for systems to separate and exclude them from educational services and to retain them in residential care institutions. A greater knowledge of the capacity of educationists to assist this group of children to reach full potential has accentuated the need to include this group within appropriate educational programs.

Other children may, for one reason or another, find themselves excluded from traditional educational services. Developments in distance education, second language learning and compensatory programs are necessary to enable this principle to be implemented. Systems need to be alert to small and sometimes overlooked groups to ensure that they are not excluded from education.

2. Education as Early as Possible

Early education for the handicapped follows a general accentuation of the benefits of pre-school educational programs. Such programs were felt to be of particular benefit to socio-economically disadvantaged children as well as to young handicapped children.

In a recent review of the known research in early education (Bailey and Wolery, 1984) the following points emerge:

a) Low income children who followed eight well-run, well-controlled pre-school projects similar to Head Start were less likely than control group children (with no early intervention) to be placed in special education classes, less likely to repeat a class, had higher achievement test performance, were more achievement oriented and their mothers had higher vocational aspirations for them. (Lazar and Darlington 1979.)

b) The evaluation of early intervention programs for handicapped children is not as clear-cut. The difficulties of obtaining appropriate control groups, differing handicapping conditions, small numbers and differing levels of severity of handicap, make generalisations and evaluation difficult.

Nevertheless, developmental progress can be consistently recorded, as can a growth in independent functioning. A greater number of these children enter and remain in regular classrooms and there is greater parental involvement.

c) The literature lists additional reasons for providing early intervention programs. Such programs prevent the development of secondary handicaps; secondary handicaps can be identified and remediated; the programs appear to be cost effective and the benefits to parents are considerable, particularly with respect to providing support and overcoming the isolation effect of having a handicapped child.

Education provisions for children below school age have been made available in this state primarily through special schools. Children with sensory deficits have formal programs from three years of age while children who are severely or moderately intellectually handicapped may enrol at special schools from four years of age. A current pilot program is examining the efficacy of differing service models to children below school age.

3. Aims of Education for Children with Special Needs

The aims of education for children with special needs should not be different from those for their non-handicapped peers. These aims are stated in both the Primary and Secondary 'Aims of Education in N.S.W.' viz

> "The central aims of education which, with home and community groups the school pursues, is to guide individual development in the context of society through recognisable stages of development towards:
>
> perceptive understanding
> mature judgement
> responsible self direction, and
> moral autonomy".

While the aims may be the same, it is recognised that the means by which they are realised will differ for children with special needs. Such children require a range of

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additional services and resources to ensure that their disability does not exclude:

> "relevant and enriching experiences which will enhance the perspectives of life and to ensure the necessary acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes at appropriate personal levels at different stages of life".
>
> (Aims of Primary Education, 1977.)

4. Principles of Normalisation

There are a number of important principles encompassed by the term "normalisation". The term was first used in the literature by a Scandinavian educator, Nirje (1970) and refers to the creation of a lifestyle and set of living conditions for the handicapped which are as normal as possible - ie. as close as possible to those enjoyed by the rest of the population.

The concept of normalisation is especially important, given a long history of over-protection, segregation and devaluation of persons with handicaps or disabilities. As described by O'Brien and Lyle (1984), devaluation occurs when a person is seen as being different and the difference is seen as being socially significant and negatively valued. While devaluation occurs initially in the expectations of others, these expectations transfer readily to people with disabilities and are manifest in their self perception and behaviour.

As a counter measure to devaluation, Wolfensberger (1983) proposed that the highest goal of normalisation is "social role valorisation" - that is the process which seeks to enhance the handicapped person's social image and personal competencies. Already many school programs and transition programs aim to integrate people having handicaps with valued people in valued communities.

Placement in the least restrictive environment is an outcome of the normalisation philosophy. The least restrictive environment is the term used to indicate that educational placement of disabled pupils should be made with the aim of maximising peer group interaction without jeopardising the child's access to special resources essential for reaching full potential.

"Where possible, children should be able to attend a neighbourhood school in familiar surroundings and among neighbourhood peers". Strategies and Initiatives in Special Education (1982).

However, the individual needs of the child, and resources of the local school, must be assessed and appropriate educational service provided in terms of the 5 levels as outlined in the Director-General of Education's Remediation Statement of 1976, namely:

1. Children whose difficulties can be treated successfully by regular school staff.

2. Children whose difficulties are such that their teachers need specialised advisory services to maintain their development in a regular class.

3. Children whose difficulties are such that the regular school staff needs the assistance of a specially trained teacher.

4. Children needing special class placement.

5. Children needing placement in a specific education centre.

For these reasons, integration in N.S.W. is viewed as movement along the whole educational continuum, which may include:

- placement in special schools of severely handicapped children previously receiving little or no educational service;

- movement from institution to community special school;

- the transfer of moderately handicapped children from special schools to units of special classes in regular schools;

- complete or partial mainstreaming of children with handicapping conditions into regular classes in regular schools.

Whatever the particular environment in which a child with special needs is being educated, the concept of <u>age appropriate</u> programs is important. A legacy of past practice in Special Education is the pervasive influence of sequential development programs for handicapped children. People with handicaps have been treated as if they are, and always will be, children. In Australia, it was not unusual to see young people of 12-18 years attending a special school alongside 4-12 year olds.

There is evidence that keeping children with their own age peer group will promote normal social and emotional development. The only valid reason for retention, ie. holding a child in a class so that academic skills can be mastered, is also being challenged. In a review of relevant research, Holmes (1983) reports that "retained pupils fall behind during the year that they are retained and spend the rest of their academic careers in vain attempts to catch up".

Alternatives to the developmental models of programming include models which focus on preparing students for post school life in the least restrictive setting, omitting

early childhood-type activities where they are not age appropriate. Environmental approaches to curriculum development require educators to examine activities in which the young person is, could be or will be involved, in 3 domains - independent living; leisure/recreation; vocational, and the environments in which these activities will take place. Specific tasks or adaptations can be taught, to enable the young person to participate partially or fully in age-appropriate activities.

In N.S.W., special schools have enrolment ages at least equivalent to local schools, and have a considerable number of special classes attached to regular schools. A major development has been the provision of some 75 classes for the moderately intellectually handicapped in both primary and secondary schools.

5. Importance of Programs to Develop Life Skills

Non-handicapped children are able to profit from the usual experiences of childhood and as a result, can learn a variety of functional and adaptative skills. Handicapped children frequently do not profit from those experiences and as a result do not learn such skills.

The teacher's role in attempting to facilitate the development of such skills becomes critical to the child.

In N.S.W. we have established a Curriculum Project Team for the Severely Handicapped. This team, operates in a manner similar to other Curriculum Project Teams ie. a policy statement is being developed, which together with support documents will be the basis of advice to the system on how life skills may be taught.

A feature of the team is the heavy involvement of academics, medical practitioners, parents and therapists. It is a unique Curriculum Project from which considerable benefit will come to many very handicapped children.

Lest this be seen as advocating separate programs for all handicapped children, might I emphasise the necessity to utilise the normal curriculum, adapted, where necessary, for the majority of children with special needs. A significant step in that direction was the decision by the Board of Secondary School Studies to eliminate the separate curriculum for slow learners. This decision supports the notion that schools should be broadening their curricula, offering more relevant courses to a wider range of students.

6. Assessment Procedures

Basic to the provision of any services to children with special needs is the necessity to carry out assessment procedures upon which teachers can build individual educational programs.

While there are three broad methods of obtaining information about children viz. interviews, direct testing and naturalistic observations, I would like to highlight the importance of gathering information from interviews with parents.

Interviews:

At present a draft policy statement on parent participation, supported by the Director-General, is being considered by interest groups and it is anticipated that this policy will be disseminated soon. Basically this statement reinforces the professionally accepted belief in the advantages gained from having access to the knowledge and understanding of parents. Parents can not only describe the child's typical performance on many skills, but also can give important information relating to other areas of mobility, independence and health.

It is important that the interview is not seen as a 'gate-keeping' step, since such perceptions lead parents to be reluctant to admit that their child cannot perform behaviours common to most children of that age. Rather it should be seen as a professional step in genuinely attempting to assess the child's needs.

Testing:

The use of standardised tests is valid assessment procedure. Group tests are short, economical and easy to administer. They are well suited to early screening, particularly for milder forms of learning difficulty. Provided the data is used to refer children for further evaluation, they cannot be considered biassed or discriminatory. Nonetheless, assessment activities must ensure as much as possible that the process is conducted in a non-discriminatory manner.

Individual standardised tests, whether normed or criterion referenced, are the main assessment tools of psychologists. It is essential that not only do the experts understand the uses and limitations of their tests, but that this information is communicated clearly to parents and teachers and that together they develop a set of hypotheses (not conclusions) that will assist in the formulation of an educational program.

Observation:

Observation of the child 'in situ' is important information and should not be neglected. This requires that counsellors and teachers assess the child in a setting as normal as possible. Flexible enrolment procedures, ongoing

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review processes and the adoption of combination assessment/teaching programs have been successfully implemented in New South Wales.

As more parents seek enrolment for their children in regular schools under 'The Enrolment of Children with Disabilities' policy (Education Gazette, 9 July 1981), it is important that principals and their school counsellors utilise all of these aspects in determining what are the needs of the child prior to their consideration of the capacity of their school to meet the needs of the child seeking enrolment.

7. Community Consultation

It has been a feature of the 70s and 80s that parents and community members in organisations have sought increased consultation with both policy makers and those delivering services to their children. The consultation they seek includes participation in policy development and participation in decision-making about resource allocation.

The development of a consultation process that is far more than a mutual informing and sharing of concerns is related to a number of factors including: better community acceptance of disabled persons; legislation encompassing Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti Discrimination principles; the readiness of educators to perceive "parents as partners" in the education process and the practical necessity of parent involvement in new programs, for example, those that are targetted on infants or programs that focus on the development of life skills in naturalistic settings.

In N.S.W. the process has also been influenced by the program of "Assumption of Responsibility" whereby the Government has offered, and is progressively undertaking full responsibility for schools formerly conducted by charitable organisations for the disabled. The "Assumption of Responsibility" program has involved extensive parent/government negotiation which has resulted in an established mechanism and a network of personnel for continuing consultation. More importantly, the program has facilitated the policy consultation role by eliminating the direct care role that organisations previously performed in relation to a specific group of children and adolescents with special needs.

In N.S.W. the consultation process is also enhanced by Government action in establishing a number of statutory bodies for the handicapped which incorporate community representation.

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8. Importance of Teacher Education - Pre service and In service

The efficacy of programs, across the range of provisions from special school to fully integrated, is very much dependent on the capacity of individual teachers to develop and implement programs. Appropriate training courses need to be available for regular classroom teachers (including executive staff) and specialist teachers.

For regular classroom teachers, there is the need in pre service education to ensure that all teachers have the following competencies:

* the ability to identify children with learning difficulties

* the knowledge to locate sources of assistance for such children

* the skills to liaise effectively with specialist support.

In addition to these competencies, the movements towards integration of individual students and of classes and units within regular schools requires of regular teachers accepting attitudes, acceptance of disabled persons, sensitivity, knowledge about disability and realistically positive expectations. Education in this domain can be offered to teachers at in service and within-school programs.

Special education teachers, covering resource, itinerant and special class services, require specialist training additional to that of regular teachers. In N.S.W., this training is provided by the N.S.W. Department of Education through a number of post-graduate courses on full-time study release to successful experienced teachers. From 1976 to 1983 an average of 100 teachers per year have attended such courses. In 1984, funds were available for 145 teachers to undertake training in courses covering the range of vision, hearing and communication disorders, general special education and early childhood (special education).

It must however be remembered that general post-graduate training in special education only commenced in 1974 and there is still a considerable short-fall in the number of practising special education teachers with appropriate special training. The one-year training courses have been augmented by the provision of a number of shorter courses (8 weeks) designed for teachers working with specific populations - for example the mildly intellectually handicapped and the severely handicapped. This year a further course is planned for teachers of behaviour disordered children.

The maintenance of specialist training programs and a range of in service programs will provide an increasingly sophisticated force of special educators, flexible and competent to work across a range of service models with the focus on individual learning needs rather than category of handicap.

9. Creative Use of Technology

One of the most exciting developments in special education is the application of technological advances, particularly in areas of communication, mobility and life-skills training.

Computers have greatly enhanced the learning possibilities for children with physical or sensory disabilities. As an example, we are looking at a device called the "compuvaid" for children with hearing and communication disorders - it is light-weight, portable, has a keyboard on which messages can be typed and has the capacity to accept programs; the output can be visual display to the student, larger detatchable screen for visual display to teacher, detatchable printer and voice synthesiser.

Currently in use in our schools are computers, typewriters and printers that have been specially modified for use by children with the type of physical disability that prevents normal finger tip control or hand grip. These children can, many of them for the first time, express messages, make choices and participate in education. Many of these devices have direct application to job skills training.

For young, severely handicapped children we are supporting the development of a range of "reactive toys" which move, make sounds, flash lights and can be programmed to respond to children who in the past might have been described as having no capacity to respond or initiate.

In respect of mobility, we are manufacturing and are providing approximately 150 posture chairs for physically handicapped students. These chairs differ from ordinary wheelchairs in that they can be readily adapted to the precise body support needs of individual students and that they have flexible, removable trays so that tasks and materials can be presented in the optimal manner for learning.

Building program philosophies and adaptations of existing buildings and equipment are also examples of how educators recognise and plan to meet the needs of children with special needs.

10. Use of Prevalence Figures for Planning

Planning to meet the special needs of young people is a task of considerable complexity. The number of children in

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a neighbourhood is the basic unit upon which educators base the provisions of schools and related services. Demographic studies of considerable sophistication chart the increase and decrease in these numbers and enable predictions to be made and consequent longer-term and state-wide planning to ensue. Consideration needs to be given similarly to the mechanisms used in the planning of services for the handicapped.

Many systems have remained totally dependant on the identification of actual numbers of children in need as identified by the psychological arm of the education system for planning and providing special services.

The need to identify these children is not contested but if a system has limited capacity to respond, the task of gathering data is frustrating, time consuming and practically useless. Systems need to develop mechanisms whereby they can set longer term, system-wide resource goals, recruit and train teachers to provide services. One method is to obtain reliable estimates of the proportion of children with special needs and the prevalence of such children within a system.

Warnock (1978) noted the difficulties associated with the longer-term planning of services on the traditional method (ie. the number of children who are currently attending special schools and classes). The great variation from one authority to another suggested more than regional differences, and assumed that needs were being unmet. Warnock expressed concern that such planning reinforces the engrained stereotypes of handicapped and non-handicapped. Warnock's committee argued that "the complexities of individual needs are far greater than this dichotomy suggests" and adopted the concept of "special educational need" - rather than "handicap".

Children in need, it is argued, can be ascertained by setting certain criteria and ascertaining the proportion of children who fall within that criteria. Studies by Rutter et al (1970, 1975), Webb (1976), and Pringle (1966) were extensively quoted and from these it was determined that in the United Kingdom, at any one time, about one child in six would be likely to require some form of special educational provision ie. (approx. 17%) and the committee then went on to recommend that these figures be used for the "planning of services for children and young people" (p. 41)

While these figures from the United Kingdom are generally substantiated by American prevalence figures, the use of overseas figures to plan services in Australia has always been considered suspect. It was not until the Schools Commission requested the Schonell Centre to undertake a description of special education in Australia and the Schonell Report (Andrews et al 1979) became available, that reasonably reliable Australian figures became available.

In two critical areas, learning difficulties and behaviour disorders, an attempt was made to obtain prevalence figures by asking a sample of regular primary and secondary schools (N = 800), by questionnaire, how many children

a) "display continuing difficulty in basic school learning such that they fail to respond to the usual range of teaching strategies employed by regular classroom teachers and who, in the principal's opinion, require the support of specially trained personnel";

and those who

b) "display continuing behavioural and adjustment difficulty such that they fail to respond to the usual range of management strategies employed by regular classroom teachers and who, in the principal's opinion, require the support of specially trained personnel.

While there are aspects of this survey which must give rise to questions on the accuracy of the data collected, (eg. the response rate and the method of data collection), the significant feature of this study is that it is the only one that gives Australian data by a recorded method Interestingly, the figures are commensurate with overseas prevalence figures.

In N.S.W. these figures were subsequently used in the Strategies and Initiatives Report, together with figures relating to the lower incidence handicapping conditions, to provide a prevalence table. (Table 1)

While the accuracy of the figures may need further refinement, it is considered that the prevalences could be used by systems to plan in the longer-term for the provision of system-wide resources. Given a certain resource ratio and a known number of pupils, systems can set broad goals, and direct efforts towards the attainment of those goals. Of course, prevalence estimates make no contribution to decisions about appropriate levels of service for various categories of handicap or to the more qualitatively-based resource questions.

Ascertaining service gaps and goal-setting are important systemic planning mechanisms but must not be seen as the only administrative devices to be utilised in the delivery of services. Once courses have commenced, teachers, aides and therapists must be recruited and trained and an administrative infra structure needs to be built to enable the appropriate use of the state resources where needs exist. In N.S.W. the infra structure is regional and sub-regional. To these sub-groups must go the task of ascertaining needs and distributing the resources. N.S.W. regions are large and average some 80,000 children, but given the state resources available, they have demonstrated a capacity to utilise resources appropriately and utilise them within state government priorities.

Prevalence of Handicapping Conditions

	Mildly Intellectually Handicapped in Special Schools and Classes	Mildly Intellectually Handicapped in Regular Classes	Moderately/ Severely Intellectually Handicapped	Hearing Impaired	Visually Impaired	Deaf/Blind	Behaviour Disturbed	Psychiatric or Neurologically Disordered	Delinquents	Wards	Orthopaedically Handicapped	Hospitalised	Learning Problems
	1%(1)	1.54%(1)	.35%(2)	.21%(2)	.07%(2)	.003%(2)	3.2%(1)	.05%(2)	.075%(2)	.05%(2)	.1%(2)	.05%(2)	11%(1)
A Total N.S.W. population of 4 to 18 year olds 1,285,609*	12856	19798	4500	2700	900	40	41139	643	964	643	1286	643	141417
B N.S.W. school population Government and non-government 4 to 18 year olds 1,041,691	10417	16042	3645	2188	729	31	33334	521	781	521	1042	521	114586
C Non-government enrolments 240,400 Estimates unless indicated	(3) ~~400~~	(1) 3702	(2) 1000	(3) 200	(3) 100	(2) 20	(1) 7693	(4) -	(4) -	(4) -	(3) 40	(4) -	(1) 26444
Children requiring services in Government schools	10017	12340	3500	2500	800	20	25641	643	781	521	1246	643	114973

(1) Schonell Survey
(2) Departmental (Health, Youth and Community Services, Education)
(3) Estimates
(4) Not Available

Heavy outlines identify numbers requiring special education services.

* Australian Bureau of Statistics 1978 projected figure for 1980 population based on 1976 Census.

Table 1

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These ten principles are being used in N.S.W. to continue the development of a service for our currently identified population of children with special needs. Adherence to the principles will ensure that as the needs change and as the population changes, services will be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs without major (and expensive) changes in direction.

As in most developed countries of the world, there exists already in N.S.W. an extensive special education provision of schools, classes and specialist personnel. A major task is the evaluation and consequent modification of the existing services within the framework of the principles enunciated above. This task must be undertaken concurrently with the development of new services within available resources and the total program must be considered within the total plan of Government priorities in Education.

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